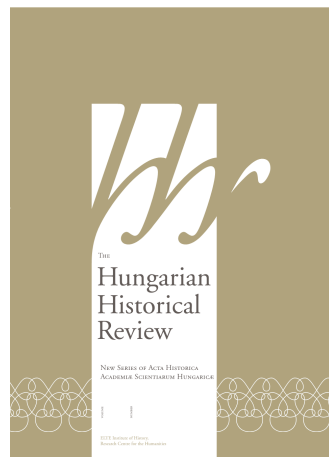


Format de citation

Hîncu, Adela : recension de : Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, Cham : Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, dans : *Hungarian Historical Review*, 2020, 1, p. 171-173, DOI: 10.15463/rec.652266678



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The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia.

By Zsófia Lóránd. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 270 pp.

Zsófia Lóránd's *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia* is an intellectual history of feminist thought, artistic practice, and activism in Yugoslavia from the early 1970s to 1991. Published in 2018 in Palgrave Macmillan's series "Genders and Sexualities in History," it speaks to multiple scholarly audiences. To those interested in the global history of second wave feminism and its relationship to the state and the political left, it offers a challenging view from the semi-periphery. To those interested in the postwar history of political thought, it presents a compelling case for the intellectual prowess and versatility of feminist thought in state socialist Europe. And for those interested in the history of former Yugoslavia, it reconstructs in rich detail the biographies, works, and institutional connections of the members of new Yugoslav feminism, a group critical of the unfulfilled promises of the Yugoslav state in terms of women's equality.

Several main theoretical and historiographical claims run through Lóránd's account of the development of feminist thought and practice in Yugoslavia beginning in the early 1970s. First, drawing on the theoretical tradition of intellectual history and especially the insights of the Cambridge School, Michael Freeden, and Lucy Delap, Lóránd analyzes feminism as an ideology. The focus is on concepts, ideas, meanings, and the struggles around them and with other ideologies, most notably Marxism. To Sara Ruddick's definition of feminism as an acknowledgement that gender divisions are socially constructed, detrimental to women, and should be changed, Lóránd adds emphasis on woman's agency (p.18), which is at the core of the most recent debates on women's organizing and feminism under state socialism.

Second, feminism is defined not as dissidence, but as "a critical discourse and a form of dissent" (p.9). Yugoslav feminists worked within the state to challenge one of its core claims, specifically the achievement of equality for women. This positioning distinguished them both from the state's political mainstream (including the official women's organizations) and from the Central European dissidents working against or outside the state, publishing in samizdat, or facing direct oppression.

Third, Lóránd works within a multilayered comparative framework which places new Yugoslav feminism in dialogue with the "second wave feminism" of the West but also with other oppositional discourses under state socialism. Most

promisingly, her work lays out the conceptual and methodological framework for an intellectual history of feminism and women's rights discourses in East Central Europe under state socialism. This project has already brought together numerous researchers from the region over several workshops and will result in a collection of source texts translated into English for the first time.

The Feminist Challenge is organized thematically and chronologically along mediums of critical expression, from the academia to art and literature to popular mass media to activism. Based on published materials, archival sources, and interviews, the chapters balance historical detail, analysis, and participants' accounts of their experiences. There are inevitable overlaps and frequent cross-references among the chapters, but overall the book structure corresponds to the development of new Yugoslav feminism itself over the course of two decades.

The chapter on feminism in the social sciences and humanities introduces the arguments of (mostly) women working in the academia, who reflected on contemporary feminist ideas in the United States and Western Europe and engaged critically with the mainstream class-based approach to the "women's question" under state socialism. Drawing on critical Marxism and French post-structuralism, their work resulted in conceptual innovation, most notably the integration of gender and sexism as key terms of the new feminist language they were developing, first in private around kitchen tables and then in public discourse.

In literature and art, feminist discussion revolved around the topics of creativity, motherhood, and the body. Lóránd introduces the concept of "writing of sisterhood" as different from *écriture féminine*, a major source of theoretical inspiration for feminist literature in Yugoslavia. This "technique of sympathetically reflecting on the lives and fates of other women through one own's story" (p.107) is identified in works by Irna Vrkljan, Slavenka Drakulić, and Dubravka Ugrešić, among others. Lóránd also grapples successfully with the issue of female artists' refusal to identify with feminism while nevertheless engaging with deeply feminist issues, as most famously was the case of Marina Abramović.

The chapter on feminism in the popular mass media unpacks the contradictions of publishing feminist texts in popular publications which offered a wide readership but at the same time encouraged self-censorship. The most striking example is that of the debate on pornography carried out in and around *Start*, a magazine published as a local version of *Playboy*. Yet another place where the tension between medium and content is apparent is women's magazines and

TV shows, where important feminist issues were brought up in a tamed language and appeared alongside patriarchal views of women's roles. Genres like advice columns, for example, nevertheless opened up space to discuss private issues publicly, most notably sexuality and domestic violence.

It was precisely around the issues of sexuality and violence that feminist groups were reorganized in the 1980s. The chapter on feminist activism follows the discussions around women's health and violence against women, the know-how gathered by plugging in to global networks, and eventually the establishing of SOS helplines first in Zagreb and then in Belgrade. "Through the discourse about VaW [violence against women]," argues Lóránd, "the place of feminism was explicitly rethought in a human rights framework," opening a new era in which "women's political participation and role in democracies were the focal point" (p.208). Not long thereafter, the landscape of feminist thought and activism was radically reshuffled by ethno-nationalism, war, and the breakdown of Yugoslavia, which is where the timeline of the book ends.

Zsófia Lóránd writes with clarity, nuance, and feminist commitment, and with this book, she offers a fundamentally important work of scholarship which persuasively argues that feminist thought needs to be recovered not just for the sake of historical justice, but also because it reshapes the very view of history that we currently have. *The Feminist Challenge* must also be praised for its many illustrations, which further ensure that the representatives of new Yugoslav feminism, their works, and their activities, which have been so masterfully presented in this book, are seen, in all meanings of the word.

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